

## Chapter 12

# Cultural Influences on Academic Sharing: A Challenge to Academic Honesty

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to examine student perspectives on academic sharing, in both online and face-to-face higher educational settings, focusing on generational and cross-national differences. In recent years, students have taken to excusing traditional acts considered to be cheating as benevolent acts of generosity and caring. This study empirically examines if engagement in cheating behavior, rationalization of unfair advantage, and acceptance of academic dishonesty are predictable using measures of age and culture. Specifically, the authors tested for differences between millennials and pre-millennials and differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Not surprisingly, the results confirm that students engage in acts of academic dishonesty. This study indicated, however, that many students increasingly consider certain acts of academic dishonesty as appropriate behavior. Millennials and some students from more collectivistic countries are rationalizing damaging acts of cheating as common and acceptable. These students are systematically shifting blame for their bad acts onto others.*

### INTRODUCTION

Participation in the “sharing economy” is associated with the millennial generation, who tend to prefer access to goods and services rather than physical ownership (Hunt, 2017). While the concept of sharing has been applied to transportation, house rentals, and decision making, there are clear implications for the modern academic environment. Not only does sharing apply to this subculture of millennials in the classroom, it also relates to national cultures categorized as collectivistic. An increase in academic sharing has elevated this particular phenomenon to a behavioral norm as opposed to an anomaly. Shar-

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ing behavior, historically characterized as unacceptable in educational environments, has become so commonplace with millennials and collectivistic cultures that professors are finding it challenging to communicate appropriate classroom behavior.

While some have concluded that concerns related to academic sharing are more prevalent in the on-line learning environment, the problem has been observed in both traditional and online course delivery methods (Tolman, 2017). The educational landscape continues to change as electronic learning tools are increasingly utilized by faculty and students across all course delivery formats. The ability to share information, course content, and strategic approaches now occurs at lightning speed and with nearly complete anonymity (Ma, Wan, & Lu, 2008; Jones, 2011). Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that a subset of students increasingly feel empowered and view themselves as customers buying degrees instead of learners paying for an education. One of the results of this behavior has been a sense of entitlement to share and obtain unauthorized course materials such as exam answers and previously graded assignments.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide empirical research into the extent to which students view academic sharing as a learning tool versus a means to give themselves an unfair advantage over others. Specifically, we focus on cultural influences from a broad perspective, looking at both generational and cross-national differences in behavior and perceptions.

## **BACKGROUND**

Concurrent with the changes in the availability of proprietary class content, the makeup of the traditional student body is evolving (Latanich, Nonis, & Hudson, 2001; Bocchi et al., 2004; Colorado & Eberle, 2010). At many universities, increased class sizes have left professors with less time to monitor the classroom environment. The student body is increasingly non-traditional, which allows for learning from a diverse set of peers. While there are many definitions of diversity, classroom diversity includes a wide range of age, gender, racial, ethnic, and international composition. Subcultural diversity has also enhanced the classroom experience by bringing together multiple generations from baby boomers to millennials learning in the same classroom. While this provides a remarkable opportunity to join highly divergent individuals in one academic environment, it also creates a challenge regarding the perceptions of sharing versus academic dishonesty. Observation of classroom behavior and reviews of student conduct have given rise to a question regarding the degree to which subsets of students do not understand the concepts of academic dishonesty and the impact of providing/gaining an inappropriate advantage over their classmates in an educational environment.

Anecdotal evidence in the classroom has demonstrated a pattern of students referring to activities, which would have historically been identified as academic dishonesty by using the term “sharing” (White, 2003; Pulfrey, Durussel, & Butera, 2018). Academic sharing includes a wide range of concepts regarding peer-to-peer leaning but also interactions that would typically be considered cheating in a U.S. educational institution, such as posting the answers to an online exam that is ongoing, providing links to websites with answers to test bank questions, posting graded assignments with professor feedback, and submitting identical individual assignments from two or more people. All of these have been observed in face-to-face, hybrid, and/or online classes. The propensity for confusion between sharing and cheating requires us to review the literature on academic dishonesty.

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